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IMPRESSIONS OF THE GERMAN SYSTEM OF TRAINING TEACHERS FOR THE HIGHER SCHOOLS

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The German system of training teachers for the higher schools is an integral part of a complex and elaborate educational system, and judgment concerning its merits should be based upon a knowledge of the whole organization. No nation has a more clearly defined idea of the ends of education, and in no nation will be found more carefully considered means for the attainment of those ends. In this discussion an attempt will be made, not to examine or criticize German ideals, but only to record impressions concerning the efficiency of the German methods of training teachers for the schools in which those ideals are to be worked out, and incidentally to suggest the adaptability of some parts of their system to our own purposes. The points to be considered are the general academic training in the higher school and the university; the pedagogical training in the university; the state examination (*Staatsexamen*); the seminar year (*Seminarjahr*); and the trial year (*Probejahr*).

The general academic training of the higher-school teacher is excellent. In the higher school he has been thoroughly drilled in the elements of many subjects, as a glance at the programs of studies for these schools shows. Before he leaves the school, he has, in most cases, chosen the subjects in which he wishes to give instruction when he becomes a teacher. In the required three years at the university he has an opportunity for scholarly training both in these subjects and in such others as he may elect. He may even proceed to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy before taking the state examination for admission to the *Seminarjahr*. Although this is not required, an increasingly large number of students do it. The result is that he is a well-trained, scholarly, and reasonably mature man before he

is admitted to the ranks of candidates for the position of teacher in the higher schools. He has had time and opportunity to become imbued with the spirit of the scholarly life.

Such a man is prepared to lecture at length to his pupils upon the subjects of his choice; indeed, it would be much easier for him to do this than to do the teaching that is required of him when he begins his course of practical training. He has been studying the niceties of comparative philology, let us say, or the abstractions of higher mathematics; he must now teach arithmetic and the elements of language to nine-year-old boys. In making this transition, however, he does not lose the power and the instincts of the scholar. These remain with him to give strength and inspiration for every day's work. I have seen German teachers teaching subject-matter which seemed to me to be very heavy for the grade of pupils concerned, but it was always well taught. I have never seen one "shooting over the heads" of pupils simply because he was a scholarly man. On the other hand, it was a great satisfaction to see classroom work in which the teacher gave no anxious thought to the subject-matter but had his whole attention fixed upon teaching to pupils that which was to him perfectly familiar. The American fear that a man may know too much to be a good secondary-school teacher does not prevail in Germany. If the danger exists, a way of overcoming it seems to have been found. My impression is that the superior scholarship of the German teacher is the most important single factor in the excellence of German schools.

Take, for example, the field of modern-language teaching. The ideal of the schools is to give the pupils not only a reading knowledge but also an elementary speaking knowledge of the language studied five or six years in school. Under no circumstances can such a knowledge be attained except from a teacher who knows both the written and the spoken language. The philological training of German students is always thorough, but they are now required to add to this a speaking knowledge of the language gained by at least six months' residence in a country in which that language is spoken, or they must show equally satisfactory proficiency gained in some other way. The impetus to

foreign-language teaching given by such instructors is tremendous. They not only learn the language but they become acquainted to some extent with the spirit of the people whose tongue it is—a very important element in successful language teaching. Under their instruction the language is “moved” and the pupils are accustomed from the beginning to assist in the operation. The language studied becomes the language of the classroom, and the pupils learn the common idioms of speech and correct pronunciation as well as the significance of words as they appear on the printed page. The attainments of German teachers of the modern languages are at once surprising and discouraging to the ordinary American modern-language teacher, and the fundamental basis of success is found in the teacher’s thorough knowledge of the subject-matter.

The theoretical pedagogical training received by the student in the German University is a rather uncertain quantity. As a university student he is entirely free in his choice of subjects. His interest may or may not lead him into pedagogical courses, if he is in an institution in which such courses are given. Reference to the list of courses in education offered in German universities from Easter, 1907, to Easter, 1910, shows that the opportunities for pedagogical training are very limited in some of them. In several cases they are confined to philosophy, ethics, and general psychology, which are nearly always given. In a few institutions educational psychology holds a high place. The most common course in pedagogy proper is that in the history of pedagogy and pedagogical systems. Courses in general method and in methods of teaching particular subjects are occasionally given, and also courses in gymnasial pedagogy. Courses in management and in the sociological phases of education are almost entirely wanting, probably because management is so largely an affair of school administrators, and because the study of sociological problems, outside of official circles, has not yet taken a deep hold on German thought. In only a few institutions is there opportunity for observation and practice teaching under the supervision of the university department of education. The fact that the student must be examined upon philosophy and

pedagogy will probably induce him to take at least one or two courses in these subjects and in psychology, but the number of courses may be very small and the work elementary. An examination of the reports of the candidates in the *seminarium praeceptorum* shows that this was actually the case in several instances. In general the study of the theory of education in the university course of prospective teachers is not very extensive, and in some cases more would certainly be desirable. On the whole this work seems not superior to that offered in many American universities, and it is probable that the American student now devotes as much time to it as his German cousin.

The state examination has for its purpose the testing of the attainments of the student on the scientific or purely academic side to determine whether his scholarship is sufficient and of such a character as to make him a suitable candidate for the position of teacher in the higher schools. A considerable knowledge of religion, the German language and literature, philosophy, and pedagogy is thought to be a necessary part of the equipment of every teacher, and this is tested in every case by an oral examination and by a thesis which is supposed to indicate the applicant's power to think and to express his thoughts systematically. In the preparation of the thesis he is permitted to use books freely, but he is required to sign a statement that he has received no assistance from persons. The examination in the subjects which he wishes to teach is much more severe. He must defend his thesis, he must write a short paper on some topic assigned at the beginning of the three-hour period permitted for it, and he must pass an oral examination before the committee of examiners. In all of its different forms the examination is a serious and dignified procedure and a real test of the applicant's ability, in various directions. It gives assurance that the required three years at the university have not been spent in vain. It tests general culture, scholarly knowledge of the principal subjects, ability to use the German language in the systematic expression of ideas, and, in a general way, the trend of the candidate's thought. On the whole, it seems to emphasize the important things and to contribute safety and dignity to the profession.

The *Seminarjahr* is the keystone in the arch which binds together and holds in place high academic scholarship on the one side and thorough pedagogical training on the other. It is the most modern and the most distinctive feature of the German system of training teachers. Before its establishment in 1892, the teaching in German higher schools was what might have been expected from scholarly men with a minimum of theoretical pedagogical training. Since its introduction the practical pedagogy of the higher schools has greatly improved. The Germans themselves feel that the institution is still in its infancy and that it may be made more effective with experience, but in general they have great faith in it. It was introduced because a need was felt for better professional training than was afforded by the academic and theoretical pedagogical work of the university and by the trial teaching of the *Probejahr*. The purpose of the new institution was to combine theoretical and practical pedagogical training under the direction of a practical school man of long and successful experience, who was competent to show the relation between theory and practice.

The members of the seminar constitute in themselves the most striking factor in the work of the *Seminarjahr*. They are young men, usually between twenty-five and thirty years old; they are scholarly, capable, ambitious, and eager for admission to their profession. The career upon which they are about to enter is an honorable one and it will afford a competence for themselves and their families. They have but to prove themselves competent during this year and the next, and the doors of the profession swing open to them for life. They must succeed, however, during these trial years; otherwise they miss the goal entirely. They have every incentive to become good teachers at the earliest possible moment, and they are in a position to profit greatly by the training which the work of the year affords.

The ability of the members of the seminar as learners is matched by that of the directors as instructors. They are always men of long and successful experience, and they are chosen with a view to their adaptability to this work. They are university-trained men who have proved themselves as teachers and admin-

istrators, and some of whom have won distinction through their writings. In several cases they are professors of pedagogy in the universities of the cities in which they live. They are practically always directors of higher schools, the proper administration of which is their chief interest. The candidates are enrolled as members of the teaching staff in these schools, and it is the business of the directors to make of them the best possible teachers. The work required by such men under such circumstances may be more or less theoretical, according to their training and inclination, but it will surely be practical. The candidate must reduce his theory and his scholarship to actual practice in successful teaching. There is no sharp separation between theory and practice as there may be when instruction is given by university professors who have no direct acquaintance with the practical work of the schools. These directors are likely to be fairly well informed on pedagogical theory, and that theory has been illuminated by years of practical experience. They are at liberty to call to their assistance expert teachers of the subjects in which they themselves have not had special training, so that the direction of the seminar work is always in the hands of scholarly, expert, practical teachers.

Candidates and directors alike bend their efforts toward the attainment of practical results. Considerable knowledge of pedagogical theory on the part of the candidates may fairly be assumed, and the subject is further studied and discussed in the weekly meetings of the seminar, but the largest returns come through the actual teaching of the candidates under close supervision and criticism either by the director or by the special teacher to whom the work of a candidate has been assigned. They are usually given the lower classes, where the problem of method is much more evident than it is in the higher classes. It is real teaching, in a real school, under normal conditions, that is done by these candidates from the beginning. They are held responsible for results not for one hour only but for the term and the year. They are not practicing, they are teaching; the pupils are not being practiced upon, they are being taught. The value of such teaching under careful criticism is infinitely su-

perior as a means of training to an occasional hour of practice teaching. When this teaching by the candidate is supplemented by hours of observation of the work of other teachers, criticism in the seminar meetings of their work and his own, and the study of general pedagogical theory and of methods of teaching particular subjects, the practical training seems well-nigh ideal. The candidate learns to study and criticize intelligently his own efforts, and he forms the habit of making the work of each hour as effective as possible from the standpoint of good teaching. I can think of no better means for the training of teachers to both theoretical alertness and practical efficiency than that outlined for the work of the *Seminarjahr*.

It is true, of course, that ideal conditions are not always found in the real seminar. Candidates lack something and do not succeed. Directors may be more or less efficient, with the possibility always existing that the work may be unduly warped by individual prejudice. The directors of the higher schools are a much over-worked body of men, the duties of the seminar add to their burdens, and often they do not have sufficient time to devote to the needs of candidates. Not infrequently the teaching staff is so limited that the candidates are required to teach from fifteen to twenty-four hours per week from the start, thus giving insufficient time for observation, the preparation of their work, and professional study. In such cases the director and the other teachers are likely to be very busy also, and consequently the teaching done by candidates is not properly supervised and criticized. They are left too much to their own resources. The scarcity of teachers in recent years has made this state of affairs somewhat common, to the regret of everybody concerned. From the reports which came to me I received the impression that the gymnasial seminars are not always as effective as they would be if the director had sufficient time to devote to the instruction of candidates and the supervision of their work, and if the candidates had about ten hours of teaching instead of either more or less. It occasionally happens that the candidate has too little teaching to do—even less than five hours a week. In such cases he is likely to become restless because he feels that

he is simply marking time to no profit. This situation is as unsatisfactory as the opposite. Fortunately each seminar director is left large freedom in the work of his seminar, and it is reasonable to expect that out of the collective experience will ultimately come general agreement and greater wisdom in the conduct of the work. My own impression is that more theoretical pedagogical work might well be expected of students in the university, thus leaving more time for a study of its application and for the consideration of practical pedagogy in the seminar. Two things militate against this end at present, the principle of absolute freedom in the selection of university courses and the lack of opportunity for the study of pedagogy in some of the universities. When the gymnasium seminars were first established it was feared by some that not enough competent schoolmen could be found to act as directors. That fear seems not to have been realized. The legal provision that a seminar may be discontinued at any time or removed from one school to another by the provincial *Schulcollegium* is a safe-guard against the continuance of a seminar in the hands of an incompetent director. Many of the weaknesses now existing in the work of the seminars are due to conditions over which the directors have no control.

The *Probejahr*, which has been part of the Prussian system since 1826, was originally designed to keep candidates out of the profession until they had demonstrated their proficiency by actual teaching. It was a year of testing rather than of training. Directors were officially urged to give careful supervision to the work of these young and inexperienced teachers, but no express provision was made for it and the multiplicity of other duties prevented its effective accomplishment. The result was that in the great majority of cases the *Probejahr* was little more than a period of probation in which the candidate, without any particular assistance from others, had the opportunity to demonstrate his teaching ability. It was but natural that this should be regarded as unsatisfactory when educators began to think carefully about the training of teachers for the higher schools. Since the introduction of the *Seminarjahr*, the *Probejahr* has remained as a time of further testing. There is not so much

emphasis on training, as the candidate is usually not required to attend the meetings of a seminar or to follow any systematic course of professional study. However, the fact that he must make a written report at the close of the year concerning his work, and the knowledge that the work of this year is an important factor in making up his final record, serve to keep his attention fixed upon the professional character of his work, and the ultimate result is a considerable amount of training. When the candidate in the *Probejahr* is assigned full work, that is, twenty-four hours a week, and is paid as an assistant, the year seems to serve a purpose without being a burden; but when he is given only a few hours of teaching and receives little or no pay he is likely to become restless, and for good reason. I am disposed to share the opinion of a considerable number of German educators, that if the work of the *Seminarjahr* were properly ordered and the time of the candidates wisely divided between theoretical and practical studies as good pedagogical results would be obtained from one year of training as are now secured from two, and the *Probejahr* would be superfluous. The present custom safeguards the profession at the expense of the individual candidate. When one takes into consideration the sharp competition for place in Germany, however, and the scrupulous care exercised by the government in the selection of teachers, it is easy to understand, and perhaps also to justify, the existing requirement.

Political, social, and industrial conditions in Germany are very different from those in the United States. Nevertheless it seems to me that we could with profit follow Germany's example in some matters relating to the training of teachers. It may not be possible now to require as high general academic scholarship of the teachers in our high schools as is required of the teachers in German higher schools, but a considerably higher standard than now prevails is both desirable and feasible. The theoretical pedagogical training required of German teachers is not too much to ask of our high-school teachers, and opportunities for securing it are available in many American universities. We may well look toward the adoption of a thorough special examination for high-school teachers, an examination that shall give

both safety and dignity to the calling. Especially should we adapt the work of the *Seminarjahr* and the *Probejahr* to our needs. We either already have or we are rapidly developing facilities in our colleges and universities for the instruction of candidates in general academic subjects and in the theory of education, but there is yet lacking an institution that does the work of the German gymnasial seminar. It is needless to say that the *Seminarjahr* and the *Probejahr* can not be taken over entire; they would have to be modified and adapted to American conditions. I believe that such adaptation may be found in a combined effort of the high schools and the pedagogical departments of the colleges and universities, under the leadership of the latter. Full discussion of the subject must be deferred, but in brief the argument is that, since the colleges are particularly interested in promoting educational efficiency in the secondary schools, and since they can provide both the needed general academic culture and the theoretical professional training for secondary teachers better than can any other institution, they should assume the responsibility for this work; and that, because the high schools profit greatly by having well-trained teachers, and because they can provide better facilities for the practical training of teachers than can any other institution, they should co-operate heartily with the colleges in the systematic accomplishment of this hitherto neglected part of the work.